

PRESS CONFERENCE:

U.S. Army Colonel Terry Ferrell, Commander, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division

U.S. Air Force Colonel Peter Donnelly, Commander, 18th Expeditionary Air Support Operations Group

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PARTICIPANTS:

**Colonel Terry Ferrell
Colonel Peter Donnelly**

REPORTERS:

**Hillary Brown from ABC News
Ahmed Jessem from [unintelligible] Iraqi Newspaper
Sarah Ford from NBC
Debbie Block from Voice of America Radio and TV
Brad Brooks from The Associated Press
Ray Homer from ABC News
Jamie Gumbrick[ph] from McClatchy
Brian [last name not provided] from AFP**

REPORTERS 1-12

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

UNIDENTIFIED: Colonel Terry Ferrell, Commander, 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division and U.S. Air Force Col. Peter Donnelly, commander, 18th Expeditionary Air Support Operations Group. Both commanders will make brief opening statements and then open it up for questions and answers.

COL FERRELL: Good morning. Sorry for the slight delay there. First and foremost, thank you for joining us this morning. I am Colonel Terry Ferrell, commander of the 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division; part of Task Force Marne. Yesterday morning we launched a rapid sequence of precision air strikes southeast of Baghdad in the Arab Jabour region. This strike was part of the Operation Marne Thunderbolt, one of a series of offensive operations under the umbrella of Operation Phantom Phoenix, a countrywide campaign that was launched Tuesday by Multi-National Division Corps or Multi-National Corps to target al-Qaeda sanctuaries. In our battle space, these air strikes are part of the overall operations aimed at ridding al-Qaeda from the southern Arab Jabour regions. These strikes were very carefully planned targeting suspected improvised explosive devices and weapons caches and taking into full account the affects on the area as well as the citizens that live in those locations. One of the top priorities, of course, in conducting these strikes is the

impacts on the safety and security of the local citizens. Most importantly was the close coordination and the synchronization we had with the Air Force to plan these strikes that resulted in the success that we believe and see in the result of these actual operations. The purpose of these particular strikes was to reduce the threat to the coalition, the security forces, and the civilians that we have as we move into the area to take the fight to al-Qaeda as we move further into southern Arab Jabour. This by no means is an escalation of fighting in Iraq. However, it is just one more step in maintaining the security that we see as necessary as we continue in the operations here with our relentless pursuit of ridding the al-Qaeda and all extremists from our battle space within the 2nd Brigade area of operations. Thank you.

**COL
DONNELLY:**

The air strikes yesterday were fully synchronized with the brigade's ground maneuver plan. These were deliberate strikes planned to achieve specific battlefield effects. Two U.S. Air Force B-1B bombers and four F-16 fighters employed approximately four dozen precision-guided, direct-attack munitions or J-DAMs on targets in the Arab Jabour area south of Baghdad. Positive affects were achieved and the strikes were a successful element of Operation Marne Thunderbolt. More than 50 targets were identified by the 2nd Brigade combat team in order to destroy known improvised

explosive device and cache locations. As part of this strike, we hit 47 of the planned targets. The remaining targets were hit...not hit due to collateral damage concerns from the ground commander. The initial time over target was also adjusted for the same concerns. These decisions to not strike certain targets and to adjust the initial strike timing, highlight the importance we place on reducing collateral damage and ensuring that we do everything in our power to avoid unnecessary damage and suffering. Yesterday's events are significant due to the number of munitions dropped in such a...

**COL
DONNELLY:**

...strike is carried out every day as the Air Force and Army integrate to achieve joint objectives. As we continue Operation Marne Thunderbolt, Operation Phantom Phoenix, and future operations, we will continue this integration and synchronization to ensure we continue our pursuit and destruction of AQI extremists. We will now take your questions. Yes, ma'am.

REP1:

Hillary Brown, ABC News. This was probably the most intensive air strike since the war. How could you not have civilian casualties from that? And what were the civilian casualties from this air strike...from these air strikes?

**COL
DONNELLY:**

Ma'am, there were...I will actually ask Colonel Ferrell to

participate in the answer to this question, but the terrain was specifically chosen. And has been mentioned, the strike was actually delayed to avoid collateral damage to both civilian structures and to civilians.

REP1: Do you mean that the civilians were warned to get out of there?

**COL
DONNELLY:** Colonel Farrell, can you address this?

**COL
DONNELLY:** Okay.

REP1: He didn't hear. Perhaps Colonel Donnelly can answer it.

**COL
DONNELLY:** I don't believe there was a specific warning. I don't know the answer specifically. But the area itself was "recce'd" before the attacks. We also had on station an unmanned aerial vehicle that surveyed the sight which led us to the delay in the strike and calling off those targets—because we actually did see civilians in the area, also a vehicle—so that they were delayed and those targets were not hit for that reason.

REP1 So as far as you know, no civilians—Iraqi civilians—were killed in the air strikes?

**COL
DONNELLY:**

As far as I know, yes.

REP1:

None.

**COL
DONNELLY:**

None.

REP1:

How many al-Qaeda were killed?

**COL
DONNELLY:**

I don't have the BDA rollup at this time; the assessment. Sir.

REP2:

Asks question in Arabic.

INT:

Question from Ahmed Jessem, it's an Iraqi Newspaper. The western part were one of the hot zones. However, due to the Awakenings that started in those places and also cooperation by tribes and tribe leaders. So why don't you apply the same technique and mechanism in other places with the tribe leaders so that you can control the terrorists that conduct violence in those places? The second question, what is the stance of the Iraqi Government from the air strikes? Have you coordinated with the Iraqi Government? Thank you.

**COL
DONNELLY:**

Terry, can you answer that question?

UNIDENTIFIED: This is James [unintelligible] again. They're trying to...did you lose connection with them?

UNIDENTIFIED: We're not hearing anything from them, James. I'm sorry, sir. Colonel Ferrell can't hear us right now. It's more in his lane to answer that question at this time.

COL FERRELL: Go ahead.

UNIDENTIFIED: [unintelligible]

COL FERRELL: Go ahead and try to ask the question again. I can hear you barely.

UNIDENTIFIED: Okay, sir.

REP2: Repeats question in Arabic.

INT: In the western areas...al-Qaeda used to control the western areas but due to the Awakening movements led by the tribes in those leaders and the people in those leaders, you were able to control and destroy all al-Qaeda there. So why don't you coordinate with the people and the tribe leaders in Arab Jabour and also you coordinate with the tribe leaders to eliminate al-Qaeda instead of using the air strikes? And we also are feeling optimistic and we feel optimistic so

that this year will be a year of reconstruction so that through the people who live there you can control the terrorists. The second question is what is the stance of the Iraqi Government on the air strikes that you conducted in the Arab Jabour area?

COL FERRELL: Well, first and foremost, we are working with the concerned local citizens and they have been invaluable. And with the Iraqi security forces. The Iraqi security forces, along with the coalition, along with concerned local citizens have done a phenomenal job in the initial operations we've been conducting in Northern Arab Jabour in the towns of Abuwaitha, Arab Jabour, Adwaniyah, [and] Horajeb to rid that area and to make it secure from al-Qaeda. And as al-Qaeda has continued to move to other areas southeast, southwest—away from where it is now secure because of the concerned local citizens and because of the efforts of the Iraqi security forces—we continue the relentless pursuit of all al-Qaeda, all extremists so the entire area is now secure and will be secure for [the] future of Iraq and [the] future of the families that live there. And with the operations that we conducted yesterday, we had Iraqi security forces fully engaged with that as we were working through the operations. And we will continue to do that. We do all of ours in conjunction with the Iraqi security forces. That is how we've seen the success that we have so far. And we will continue this throughout.

REP3: Hi. Sarah Ford from NBC. How did you identify the 50 targets that you were aiming at yesterday? And can you describe a little bit more were they houses, buildings in [the] city? Can you provide a little bit more what you guys were looking at yesterday?

**COL
DONNELLY:** Okay. The targets themselves...

COL FERRELL: Would you please...could you please ask your question again?

REP3: Hi there. It's Sarah Ford from NBC. Can you describe how you identified the targets you were aiming at yesterday? And also just describe were they buildings in rural areas, cities? What were you guys looking at?

COL FERRELL: Well, our targets yesterday that we were working with our synchronized effort with the Air Force, was improvised explosive devices and caches. Predominantly they were along roads and avenues that we would use as we'd move along in our relentless pursuit of the enemy. They would be in built up areas and palm groves along river banks; in areas that the insurgents had used to hide and cache their supplies as they worked the area. They've established a very deliberate defensive belt when you look

throughout the region here so they could delay our movement or deny our movement in many ways preventing us to go through the area. So they've tried to block and that's what the improvised explosive devices would do. Through our targeting process and working with the concerned local citizens and the information provided as we've gained information working through here, we were able to identify those locations and then target those. And the intent here is to reduce that threat to our soldiers, to the security forces, to the concerned local citizens, and to the average civilians because everyone is at risk from those explosive devices as you move through, just normal walking or the actual operations. And that was the intent of yesterday's strikes and the operations we continue to do today.

REP4: I'm Debbie Block from Voice of America Radio and TV. Why was it necessary to do such a large scale assault considering that there have been smaller ground and air assaults taking place in this region? Were you...did you have a specific purpose for doing something so large or were you trying to send a message to the area?

COL FERRELL: It's all part of the shaping operations and the operations that we've been doing for about a month now. With Operation Marne

Thunderbolt, we actually started on 1 January but within the brigade's area of operations, we've been working very diligently here for several weeks throughout the area. And as information has built and we've been able to glean where these potential improvised explosive devices are and caches are, we wanted to target those. Given the resource availability and given the timing, we took advantage of what we knew and it all came together. And working with the Air Force, we were able to do that. And yesterday's operations is one of a series of operations that we will be conducting under Marne Thunderbolt and as we work through for the next series of days and weeks ahead. Because it is a relentless pursuit that you see that we have. There was no specific reason for yesterday. It was just the availability of the information and the way the forces was laid and the information we had.

UNIDENTIFIED: Sir, in the back.

REP5: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Al-Fayha TV. During this operation, have you eliminated al-Qaeda members in Arab Jabour and the surrounding areas completely? And if yes, how would you guarantee that? And how would you guarantee that the whole area has been cleared from al-Qaeda members?

COL FERRELL: We work every day with the Iraqi security forces that operate within our environment in our area of operations—and with the concerned local citizens and the leaders of the communities—to identify the threat [from] al-Qaeda and extremists that may be there. Is all of the al-Qaeda out of these areas? They have moved. The predominant number have moved but the potential for one or two to come back in is always there. It is an ongoing requirement to always be looking for that. And that's the key to the Iraqi security force. That's the key to the concerned local citizens because they live there. They know when someone out of the normal comes into their community. They know when someone who is new comes in and something is different. That is the most valuable piece of information they provide. And it will be ongoing and routine for them to report that and work internal to their own and rid the area if they should come back in.

UNIDENTIFIED: Sir.

REP6: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Qulla[ph] Iraq Newspaper. Was there any involved in Awakening members in this operation? And how many Awakening group members do you have in Arab Jabour area?

COL FERRELL: Well, the concerned local citizens played a valuable...invaluable piece to this operation as they have in all of our operations since we've come into the area. They work with us. They show us where the IEDs are, the improvised explosive devices. They tell us who is new to the area. They tell us who potentially is the insurgents and work through that with us and the Iraqi security forces. And that is the pieces that they were able to do yesterday. And they will continue to do that. That's why they are protecting their own, protecting their towns. And that's the critical piece they bring to this. As we work through this, the numbers fluctuate from each community. And they continue to grow. And then they will be reduced over time because they are transitioning. You will see many now getting back to day-to-day life and that's the thing that they want to do as the goal of the security is established. It's simple. If you look into Abuwaitha, Horajeb, Adwaniyah, the security has started to take hold. And working with the Iraqi security forces and even working with other aspects of the government, normalcy is coming back into those communities and people are getting back to the routine of day-to-day life. That's what's instrumental. And that's why we see the need now to take this operation and Marne Thunderbolt under Phoenix even further so that we can maintain this relentless pursuit in ridding the al-Qaeda and extremists from

our area of operations.

REP7: Hi. Brad Brooks with the Associated Press. I'm just curious if you could provide us with some more detail regarding...or describe how much of the weapons were destroyed yesterday? Or give us some idea of exactly what was destroyed beyond just saying that they were weapons caches. And also, I don't know if you heard the question earlier, if you knew how many of al-Qaeda insurgents or whatever were killed yesterday?

COL FERRELL: Well, our primary focus yesterday on targeting was on the improvised explosive devices and on weapons caches. As we went about our strikes. That was the primary goal. So from the destruction piece, I would tell you that I think that we were very successful there. We believe that we were able to destroy several major improvised explosive devices in our specific region. In this layered defensive belt that I discussed earlier, we see a form of the deep, buried improvised explosive device that is well below the surface that is capable of a catastrophic affect on systems, on vehicles, and on personnel as well. So we believe that we were able to defeat several of those. We believe that we actually were able to identify and destroy several weapons caches that immensely reduces the resources that the insurgents have as we continue to

erode those and deny him the ability to have those as he tries to operate or move through the zone.

REP8: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Muldawa[ph] Newspaper. Could you tell us the nationalities of the terrorists that have been captured?

COL FERRELL: Well, in relationship to the operation that we're addressing here, we...there was no terrorists that we captured. What we see predominantly in our area is home-grown insurgents; that is what we see as we fight our way through here.

REP9: Ray Homer from ABC News. Colonel, how confident are you that AQI will not go back into these areas? Presumably the plan is to have the Iraqi forces go in there and provide ongoing security so it reduces the size of the U.S. presence. How confident are you that the Iraqis can keep these people out of that area?

COL FERRELL: I work with the Iraqi security forces. My soldiers work with the Iraqi security forces. And we work with the concerned local citizens and just the regular citizens. The Iraqi security forces we work with are getting better every day. They are capable of performing operations at a tremendous level. They go in—they want their

towns, they want their own security. It is truly a feat to watch as they take the fight to the enemy. From the average citizen on the street, to the concerned local citizen who has stood up to secure their town, to the various Iraqi security forces, they are tired of this threat. I believe as they grow here and they firm their security, that they will have security in place. We see that. It will be a constant effort on everyone's part to maintain security. But that's wherever we live that we have to maintain our security. And I believe that they understand that and that's why they fight so diligently alongside of us to rid the area of al-Qaeda and extremists.

REP10: Jamie Gumblick[ph] from McClatchy. We've seen a lot of Arab Jabour in the northern area being touted as this success story. Were these recent build ups of weapons and was there more recent activity there? Or had they been there for awhile?

COL FERRELL: Well, and you're right in there has been great successes in Arab Jabour. But when you look at the entire width and depth of the brigade's operational environment, Arab Jabour region runs north to south. If you look at it on a map, you're looking at about the size of Baltimore, Maryland where we're talking about here. So when you look specifically at Arab Jabour north—Abawaiha, Horajeb, [and] Adwaniyah—great progress has been made there. Projects have

gone in. Governance is starting to take shape. Economics is coming back on line. The local citizens are moving forward and that's the key here. As we continue to expand—we're now moving into areas that coalition forces have not been in months or years in some cases because we have had the successes we just discussed. Now we have the opportunity to continue to expand in our pursuit of the enemy. Because the enemy has moved. We've been able to rid those areas and establish those successes. Now we continue to expand because of the concerned local citizens. Because of the Iraqi security forces. And as we do that, we're identifying those caches, those defensive belts that we've discussed, and that's where we take this fight to next. It's all about finding the enemy where the enemy wants to go. It's all under the umbrella of the operation of denying him sanctuary anywhere that he wants in this country. When you look at the overall text of Phantom Phoenix, that's the intent and that's how Marne Thunderbolt rolls up under that. We take this operation and we continue to look for the enemy where he may want to move to; never giving him a chance to rest or believe that he has ground that he can say that he owns.

UNIDENTIFIED: Sir.

REP11: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: What is the percentage of casualties in the coalition forces in Arab Jabour area and what is the percentage of kidnapping and murder operations in this area as well?

COL FERRELL: We've not experienced...since our arrival into the area, we've not experienced any kidnapping or murder operations to date that I can address. Casualty figures have maintained relatively low as we continue the fight. We see that. We understand it is a fight. We will maintain that pressure as we continue to expand. As I said, we know there's a fight out there. As we expand with the Iraqi security forces and the concerned citizens and we go into new communities, we will maintain a presence and we'll establish that presence. The key here is establishing that forward so that they, too, can grow and have the same successes that I've laid out that occurred in Abuwaitha, northern Arab Jabour, and Horajeb and so forth.

UNIDENTIFIED: Last question, please.

REP12: I'm Brian from ASP. Yesterday's statements were mentioned and that purpose: destroyed were al-Qaeda and strongholds and safe havens. Today we're talking about IEDs and arms caches. Are these one and the same thing? A safe haven and IED?

COL FERRELL: When you talk about safe havens, when you talk about sanctuaries, you talk about the aspect of that's where they are basing out of or where they think they can go for respite and just reform, regroup. And in the process, the IEDs are their mechanism for their security. You know what the catastrophic effects are of IEDs to the coalition, to the security forces, and to the...just the Iraqis in general. The caches are their means to have a weapons supply or a resource supply to allow them to fight wherever they so desire. So in the process of these strikes, in the process of our ongoing operations, we erode those resources denying them the ability to go to any location to have that capability or that fighting element. And that's where we move forward. This operation allows us to continue to move forward. Marne Thunderbolt will allow us to move forces forward into areas that we've not previously been. There will be a coalition presence there. There will be an Iraqi security force presence there. We'll engage new communities. We'll be a permanent presence there that will allow us to station and the concerned citizens to grow along with the Iraqi security forces thus denying the al-Qaeda element, the extremist element there the ability to have any foothold as he will now have to find somewhere else to go. And that just gives us the opportunity for the pursuit to take it to the next location.

UNIDENTIFIED: Colonel Farrell, do you have any final comments?

COL FERRELL: I just would like to say that yesterday's operation was a tremendous operation through the coordination with the United States Air Force along with the efforts they put forward, along with the Iraqi security forces [and] the concerned local citizens. We have been doing these operations for several weeks under Marne Thunderbolt. Now that we have Phantom Phoenix as our overarching operation, we will continue. The goal here is to maintain a relentless pursuit on the enemy—on al-Qaeda, the extremists that are working in our specific battle space to rid the area. To bring security not only to the Baghdad area, but to Southeast Baghdad and the Arab Jabour region so that the average Iraqi civilian can have a normal life. That's what they want. That's what they strive for. And working together, that's our goal to achieve.

UNIDENTIFIED: We do have some additional videos that should be up on the satellite [unintelligible].